



**planned
parenthood**
toronto

the
youth and
masculinities
peer project
zine

**a compilation of experiences
and perspectives on
the complexities
of masculine
identity**



the **youth and** **masculinities** **peer project** **zine**

between june 2017 and july 2020 the youth & masculinities peer project, comprised of masculine identified youth, came together to explore building healthier relationships and sexual health.

this compilation of work was created by a cohort selected in the second year of the project.

this work speaks to the complexities of masculine identity and the contributors have shared their beautiful experiences and perspectives.

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gnanu (p 3-5)

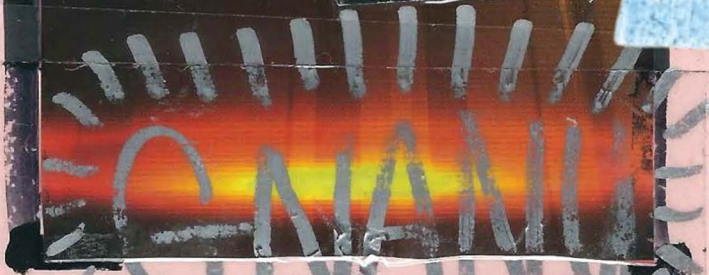
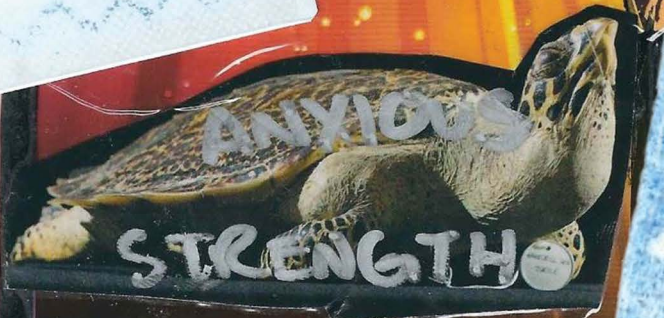
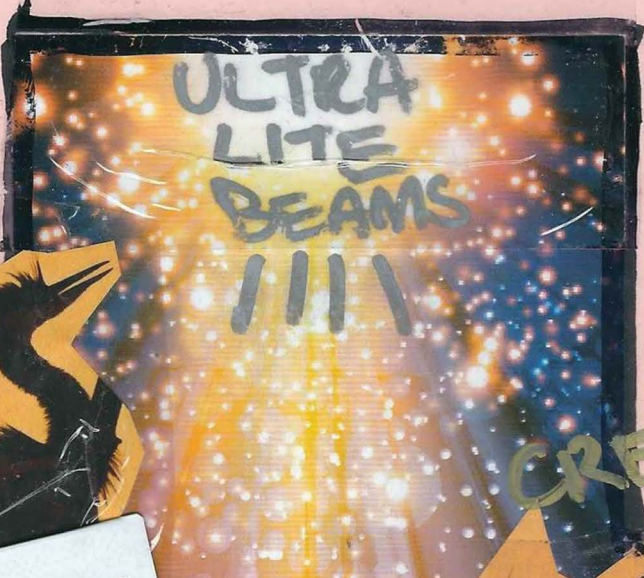
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this is a project of **planned parenthood toronto.
funding provided by **toronto urban health fund.****



(he / him)



I grew up scared I was weak.

I grew up scared that I wouldn't be

able to defend myself and that I wasn't enough of a man.

And at the same time

I grew up thinking

violence & aggression is how you stand up for yourself.

And that standing up for myself

meant communicating through my anger.

I grew up thinking this is what people valued. And I grew up attaching a lot of pride to this.

What's crazy is once I'm angry, I don't even feel guilty or shameful about it.

I'm scared how validated I feel when my reaction to something is to be violent.

I know it's wrong but it feels right to want to be violent.

It feels right to be aggressive and controlling.

It feels validating.

It's like, I'm proud that my first instinct is to fight.

I'm proud that I have that in me now when I didn't have it in me before.

Being aggressive and commanding. Being a tyrant.



It's all appealing to me.

Violence is attractive.

But it's like these are the only ways that I know how to love myself.

I can feel this violence and this need to control in my self all the time.

I feel it in me when I feel threatened or when I hear criticism.

I can't even take advice at this point.

Sometimes I feel like I'm too far gone.

And there's no turning back.

How can I catch myself when it feels so automatic?

How can I possibly change?

I felt like this for a long time and I realized
how sick I was of being like this..

I didn't feel good.

I don't want to be held in control by my instincts anymore.

I realized I don't want to have to prove myself anymore.

If I can change, then that is my power.

And I'm also starting to realize how I can love myself without proving anything.

It's difficult to get this through my head but I'm trying,
and I'm really proud of myself for that.

Then I can stand up for myself and for others in a better way.

BYKAIS PADAMSHI



**A CONVERSATION
ON BOUNDARIES:**

**MASCULINITY,
VULNERABILITY
AND
RELATIONSHIPS**

CREATING SPACE/ BUILDING THE "CONTAINER"
CAPACITY / LEARNING WITH COMPASSION /
CONFLICT AS A TEACHER / RESOURCES

INTRODUCTIONS

I would like to invite you into a conversation around the topic of "Boundaries", a term that is brought up often when talking about relationships especially the ones with our partners. I will also be unpacking Masculinity within the context of creating boundaries which leads to healthier relationships and with a few examples on the ways in which I have navigated the process through romantic and non-romantic relationships and how the idea of Masculinity manifests within these dynamics.

Who am I to be speaking on such a topic? My name is Kais and I identify as a cis-gender queer Black Man. For myself I have found many challenges in all of my relationships just as much as I found love and support.

Moving through many painful experiences and also navigating relationships with my family and friends I came across the practice of creating and setting boundaries. I have found that when I have "I can love myself and others at the same time".

I hope that we can create more conversation around boundaries, how we build, navigate and affirm them in all our relationships including with our partners. This is just the first step, direction will reveal itself when we find more clarity on how we want to be treated and how we can support others in their process.

CREATING SPACE/

"A LITTLE BREATHING ROOM WOULD BE NICE"

In some relationships we may feel a sense of being overwhelmed, burnt out, disconnected or even resentful towards the person and the circumstances. I found myself in all of the above on multiple occasions with my family, friends and especially with my previous partners.

Until I realized that something had to change and by taking several steps back I found that from the get go I had no distance from what I was experiencing and thus had no other option other than to repeat the same old patterns of reaction!

I knew I needed space but something else was missing and each time I was able to create a sense of space it would close back up. I was back to square one feeling overwhelmed and resentful. *"What I needed was something that not only supported the creation of space but to sustain it"* and it was not until one of my close friend who held space for me to vent said to me *"You need to set hard boundaries"*.

Boundaries? The word sunk into my head rigidly...Boundaries.

Like how a line creates form within space, I needed lines of my own, to help in creating and maintaining my sense of space and security. For this particular conversation I will be referring to the practice of forming boundaries in order to create a greater capacity to ground and to navigate our way through experience. This capacity building is can also be called creating the "container".

BUILDING THE "CONTAINER" CAPACITY/ "EVERY HOUSE NEEDS A STRONG FOUNDATION"

Building capacity first required me to develop an awareness not only towards my obvious upsets, triggers and down right things that would piss me the fuck off but also towards the behaviour and energy I was willing to receive from other people.

Once I had become aware of these facts and my dynamic within a relationship I started to see the patterns of:

- How I verbally and non-verbally communicated my willingness to be mistreated by responding to the dismissive and harmful behaviours of my partner.
- How I acted previously that influenced the nature of the conversation and contributed to the tension.
- How my language and method of communicating was also not as clear as I thought it was.
- The ways in which I assumed that I should be 100% understood and validated by expecting my partner to guess how I felt.

I developed a set of "non-negotiable(s)"; What I am not willing to surrender or compromise. These were my foundation. These would allow me to see "the edge" of what I knew would mostly likely set me off and be pulled into reaction.

The "non-negotiable(s)" are sets that I use in navigating the difficult conversations in expressing my upsets or wants, they also communicate to my partner and/or other person how I am willing to be treated.

And just like I have my boundaries and the ways I want to be respected by my partner and/or the other person they too have the same right.

BUILDING THE "CONTAINER" CAPACITY/ "EVERY HOUSE NEEDS A STRONG FOUNDATION"

Examples of some of my learnt and self created boundaries and ways I practice them:

- "Please try lower your tone so I can stay present in this conversation"
- "Im not sure how I _____ lets talk about it later"
- "When you say/did _____ it makes me feel like _____"
- "I am not in a space where I want to talk, lets talk later when I can be more present"
- " If you continue to do/say" this is how I will respond _____"
- "I am asking you to be mindful and respectful of _____ it means a lot to me"
- "May you please try saying that in a kinder way"
- "This/That does not feel right for me at this time"
- "I will not engage with you if this is how you will continue act/treat me"

When the practice of communicating my boundaries and affirming them was still very foreign to me. I thought how the practice alongside my relationship with Masculinity and the narrative of Masculinity shaped my "container" of understanding and re-enacting these narratives. The narrative of Masculinity and the kind I experience is a series of societal expectations that dictated and dismissed my authentic self expression and right to just exist as a living being. Having boundaries I found honours myself, my emotions, my desires, my right to express, exist and ultimately as a frame of reference to re-evaluate and to deconstruct the narrative.

- "Men do not cry"
- "Men do not act like a sissy"
- "Stop being so sensitive"
- "You sound like a bitch"

Do these somewhat sound familiar? Yeah its all bullshit but it takes alot of work to beleive it so. Im still working on it.

LEARNING WITH COMPASSION/

"ITS A PROCESS"

In creating new ways of being it is crucial to remember it is both a learning and unlearning process. Being kind to ourselves is the fundamental basis of any grounds for change and growth to occur. There are many ways in which we can be kind to ourselves in order to first understand, then empathize and build a bigger "container" for ourselves.

I would invite you for each time you doubt, out down or dismiss yourself ask yourself the following:

- Is this really what I think and where did I learn this from?
- Why do I think it is ok to say/do these things to myself and not to other people?
- How will I act out these current beliefs in ways that may be further harmful to myself and others?
- What are the ways in which I dismissed myself before and how can I show up for myself when the opportunity arises?
- What is it that I need now in this very moment?
- Can I allow myself the opportunity to really understand how I am truly feeling?
- Is this what "a man" should be feeling and wants to experience on a constant basis?

I know it is easier said then done, its a process.

CONFLICT AS A TEACHER/

"WHEN IT FEELS LIKE A STEP BACK"

Throughout the process I inevitably faced many challenges of what I considered to be set backs and failures when expressing my boundaries but I had come to find that those were more about the people's own responses to

People will respond/react in the following ways:

- Some people will learn to accept your boundaries and honour them.
- Some people will challenge your boundaries out of not having their own.
- Some people will feel personally attacked.
- Some people will flat out disregard them and continue their old patterns.
- Some people will walk away from you entirely.

I was happy to have discovered through the process that I was 100% not responsible for the ways in which other people reacted and responded to my newly found sense of self. I can only be responsible and accountable to myself.

When I place the responsibility of putting in the work of keeping me happy, I renounce my power and place an unfair burden on them in order to fulfill my needs. Its not ideal for anyone.

As you develop more awareness and the practice of boundaries you will find that you will be confronted at every step of the way and make a choice on how you choose to respond to a person and the situation.

Conflict is experience asking us to feel our growing pains.

RESOURCES/ BUILDING BEYOND

Here are some resources that I have found helpful in my own journey in creating boundaries, cultivating healthier relationships and helped to expand my previous beliefs on what Masculinity is beyond the script and what it could become:

These resources include advise from medical professionals including: Psychologists, Therapists, Authors and many more that:

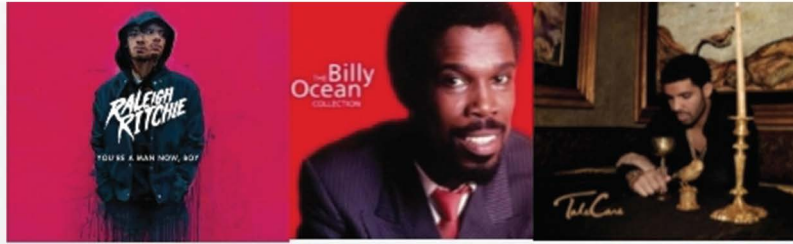
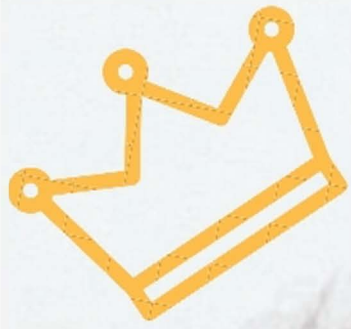
Books:

- The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook
- The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook
- The Body Awareness Workbook for Trauma
- The Racial Healing Handbook
- The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, And The Body In The Healing of Trauma
- Amateur: A Reckoning with Gender, Identity, and Masculinity

Social Media Accounts:

Instagram:

- @nedratawwab
- @the.holistic.psychologist
- @somaticwitch
- @minaa_b



Sometimes surrender can be as savage as any attack.

If you take no risks, you win no victories.



Emmanuel Lost to the Shadows

Air shifted around the occupants of the room to settle heavy on shoulders and in lungs with the familiarity of a happy drunk too far gone to realise they were making everyone else uncomfortable. The chairs creaked even without the added weight of a human body. Added to the pressure is a cold that seeped up into heavily covered feet, legs, bodies to rest in fingertips and necks. Emmanuel felt it most of all, grabbing at the sweater he left there the day before as he twisted the cube between deft fingers. Keep his fingers moving, keep his mind moving, keep the thoughts at Bay. Keep the night from trying to take over the day.

He took in all the primary colours of the cube, one side a startling white with the adjacent side a mix of reds, greens, blues, oranges and yellows. How they contrasted against the dark brown of his skin and highlighted the tremors that made each turn harder for how clammy his hands were. He felt sick as he took in the posters, one with a puppy staring up into space, cursive writing in pastel blue -no, she would say pastel blue, he thinks it's white.

Similar posters wallpapered the entire room. Many of them floral printed with empowering statements and cute animals and galaxy patterns that brought Emmanuel back to the night and back to her and back to the soft touches. The cube slipped from his hands, clattering across the floor, sound bounced off the 20 by 20 space, wormed into his ears and bounced off the inside of his skull. Loud and unrepentant in the space it took up and the way it dredged up the sound of "Crew Love" from the box he put it away in.

Too loud and too much. Too cold as the AC kicked in again. Goosebumps raised on his skin when the door opened. Squeezing more air out of the room now that two people took residence. Emmanuel scrambled for the cube. Fingers long, nimble but sausage like as he gripped the edges. It took everything to keep the sting in his eyes back.

The new occupant familiar to Emmanuel. A friend of hers and someone he felt mixed feelings about. She flutes along the room with a cloud of perfume trailing behind her as she took a seat opposite him. Her hair, done up in thick braids, flowed down the side of her face and looked him over through long lashes.

Shay was her friend, is her friend. Sickeningly loyal to the point that sharing this space, at this time, in this way pulled the sour smell of beer and faint sounds laughter from the night Emmanuel tried to keep them in. It would be worse if she were here herself but Shay made a good approximate.

Always warm and gracious and willing to support others in need. A good shoulder to shoulder through life with but her closeness to her... Emmanuel gripped the cube again and started working on the yellow side. Shay called out a greeting and he nodded his head in her direction, tongue pinned to his mouth by the taste of her on his lips and her touch on his chest. He couldn't pull it loose.

Every part of his body just on the edge of falling apart if he pulled too much, too hard, too quickly at the one thing pinning all of the night into the box Emmanuel made especially for it. A box that didn't exist the last time Shay and Emmanuel shared space.

A humming noise cut through the buzz of the A/C and he curled his toes up in shoes — palms sweating more and more as he considered what the him could even mean. What Shay could know, why she engaged him when usually she had no interest.

"You're quiet." An accusation or a question. Emmanuel couldn't tell, there was too much in the unknown. Would she be ashamed of her actions, keep the secret from everyone even Shay. Would she change the script, say that Emmanuel took the lead, caged her, bottled her, gave her a box for the night while he went about his way.

Emmanuel huffed, shoulders rose up to bury his ears, stiff, unnatural. How did he do this normally? What allowed him to interact with others. "It's just a quiet day."

"Yea I get that." Did she?

He tried to be more available, squeezed out words past his lips now that's already done and didn't fall apart. "Did you go to the party last night?"

"No. I was tired."

"Ok."

The air burnt around him. Too hot now even as the AC cooled him down, made his shirt stick to his skin and his eyes water. Reminded him of her and the ways her body felt unnaturally hot on his. He shivered as more of the night tried to seep into his day and his fingers dropped the cube again.

Emmanuel rescued it, putting the cube away. It wasn't helping and Shay wasn't helping either as she watched him, unmoving with the exception of a flicked thumb over her phone screen. As much a part of the background as the plain brown couches with their pastel -no. Light, not pastel. She loved her pastels and Emmanuel couldn't stop himself from associating pastels with her.

"If you want to talk, I'll listen."

Easy enough to say but there were rules and boundaries and things that came under the implication of social niceness and who was whose friend and what you can say without it hurting you further down the line.

"So I have this friend. They got into it with someone."

"Oh yea?" Shay put her phone down. "What happened?"

The night happened. She happened. Touches that he didn't ask for and couldn't walk away from happened. Emmanuel rubbed the night away. Put it back in it's box. It was past couldn't, wouldn't bother him. Shouldn't bother him in the first place.

"He went to a party ran into this girl." Keep it in the box, keep it in the box. "They weren't really a thing but they started feeling each other. My friend," too much information, gotta cut back, keep things neutral.

"They did it but the guy, he feels a ways about it."

"Okay, and he didn't say anything to her?"

Say what? No? Not now? I'm not ready? Be that guy that gets a girl and is too much of a coward to follow through? To get that reputation following him around? What was he supposed to say? Emmanuel shrugged, that same stiffness still in his limbs and back. He watched Shay. Watched the way her perfectly set lips jabbed her cheek quick enough that Emmanuel wondered if he dreamt it.

"Well he should have said something then." The air spun between chilly and hot, as sweat rolled down his back and the feeling left his toes and feet. His mouth dried up again and it took everything in him to reach for the water bottle at his side.

The water didn't help. Nothing but a weight that pushed out the little air his lungs managed to gather and burn through it quick. He breathed deeply to keep the pain in his eyes from squeezing onto his face. "And if he couldn't say anything then though?"

"Then that's his problem." She picked her phone up, crossing her leg over her knee with finality, plugging in her earphones and calling it a day. Emmanuel took it all in all. The wall Shay erected between them and how insurmountable it was despite its impermanence. No different that way she was once she was done. He got up, brushed his shoulders off and left.

8 Virtual Crushes

By Ross Dickson

Inspired by Elisha Lim's *100 Crushes*

I crush hard on boys. Real hard. It's easy when they're not *real*--most of my crushes come from the *virtual world*. A world of magic and adventure where manly men with impossibly huge muscles shoot lightning bolts out of their hands. Where good vs. evil is clear af so there's no moral ambiguity. Where the main character (a man) saves the princess (a woman) at the end of the day. Where everyone is straight but I can at least pretend they're not.

Gambit

Medium: TV

Tribe: Clean-cut or Otter or Daddy

Description:

Others:

Bow from Shera

Brock from Pokemon

Tristan from Yugioh

Wolverine, Beast, Sabretooth



The *real world* is much different: there's no magic, distinguishing between good and evil is less clear and you can't pretend boys aren't straight. The boys at school made sure of that, calling me gay/fag/homo most of my childhood. Keep that gay shit in the *virtual world* where you won't infect anyone with your perversion. *Real world* boys were my friends, family, bullies, bullies-turned-friends, classmates, teachers, students and strangers--I didn't want to hurt them with faggot ways. I averted eye contact at school so no one could accuse me of checking them out. I avoided physical contact so no one could accuse me of feeling them up. I cut off my desire in the *real world* to be safely straight, pouring all my feelings into the *virtual world*.



Matrix

Medium: TV

Tribe: Leather

Description:

Enzo Matrix is a character from the Canadian children's cartoon *ReBoot* –the first CGI television show ever created. The show follows the adventures of Bob, Dot and Enzo, sprites living inside a computer, as they battle viruses, play games with the “user” and other bad guys. The character starts off as a child named Enzo and grows into a grizzled manly man after I have his shoulder tattoo!

Others:

Optimus Prime

Shadowraiders



Wakka

Medium: Video Game

Tribe: Jock

Description:

Asd

Others: Kimahri, Auron, Tidus

Virtual boys don't talk to you. It's a one-way line of communication. I observed them on TV, jacked off to them in porn, studied them in yaoi, embodied them in video games, pined over them in movies, watch their streams, liked their posts online, and eventually chatted with them on Grindr (where most boys are still *virtual* because you don't end up meeting them). I consumed boys' bodies, thoughts, emotions, stories, adventures as much as possible, sustaining my desire but never acting on it. My *virtual* desire didn't belong in the *real* world.

My dick got hard at the Sears underwear catalogue in Grade 7, prompting me to discover porn. Porn. Wow. Now *real world* boys were accessible through *virtual* means. *Real world* bodybuilders, veterans, athletes, jocks, etc. performing sex for money, warping my brain to believe that their hairless, grunty, toxically manly, awkward, emotion-less, poop-less, fully douched, drug-fueled sex was what I should aspire to. I became obsessed (like most boys). I believed porn stars were *real world* gay men acting out their desires and thus associated sex with love, sex with value, sex with worthiness. Sure, I had other gay role models from TV shows and movies, but I always circled back to porn as my *virtual* view into the world of *real* gay men. To this day, I hold the twisted belief that I should somehow “be a porn star,” as gay men are “supposed to be.”



Shinrajunkie

Medium: Cosplay

Tribe: Geek

Description:

Asd

Ya, I know he's Wakka.
It's a thing...

Others:

Gaymer geeks cosplayers
insert here

When I came out in university, it was so freeing to say I liked boys out loud. I played up my gay card around my mostly straight friends--I'd check out guys on the street, dissect their bodies, invent fantasies, judge the pieces of them I approved of and talk about approaching them. I never did. I talked about boys so much because they were still a far-off idea to me. I was still in the *real world* where you don't pull that gay shit. Don't be a gay pervert that hits on straight guys. Keep your daydreams in your head, out of the *real world*.



Trihex

Medium: Streaming

Tribe: Geek

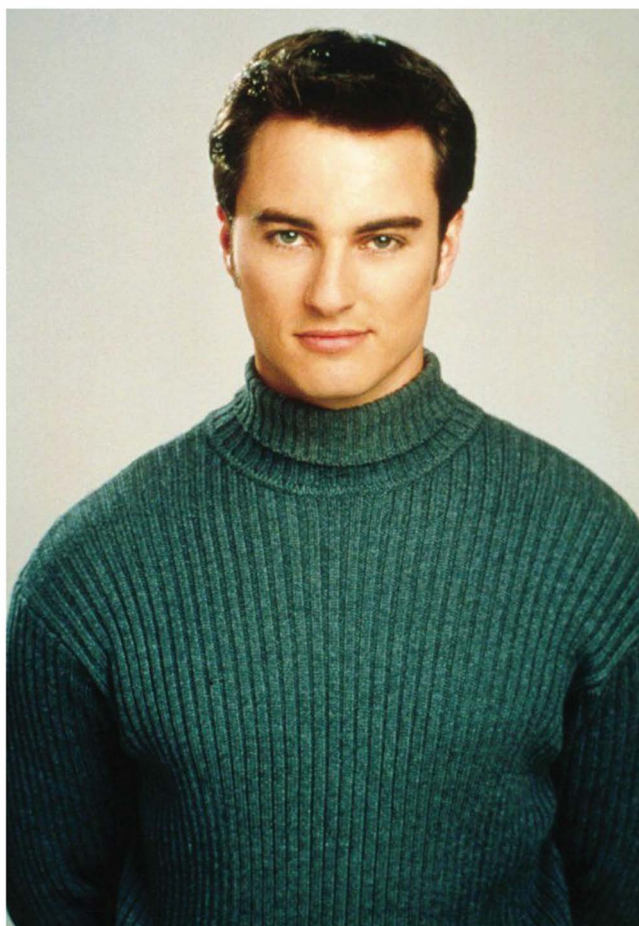
Description:

Asd

Others: Fitzyhere, Grandpoobear

Even though I'm a young gay man in a gay city, they seem so untouchable, like actors on TV. They aren't *real*. I could go clubbing fully surrounded by queer men, make out with a few and still feel so distant from them. I'd attend Pride, go to queer mixers, make some queer friends, have lots of meaningless sex, but still feel disconnected. It's easier to love *virtual* boys.

Then I discovered Grindr and hookup apps. Entire *virtual worlds* of boys at your fingertips, just like the games I'd play as a kid where I drooled over the characters. Now the game had *real world* rewards: sex and drugs. (Other rewards include addiction, intimacy, romance and friendship, but let's focus on sex and drugs for now.) I spent a lot of years having a lot of empty sex and doing a lot of drugs. I was emulating the porn stars I consumed *virtually*, fucking my way through a bucket list of sex acts: fisting, dp, threesomes, orgies, drugs, toys, etc. Some boys wanted to cuddle, some boys wanted to date, but I couldn't allow that so I always ran away out of fear. *Real* boys were just characters in my *real world* video game of sex adventures.



Jack

Medium: TV

Tribe: Discreet

Description:

Asd

Others:

Marco from *degrassi*,
Zane/Riley from
degrassi,

Queer as folk

Nowadays, I'm trying to separate the *real* vs. *virtual world*. *Virtual* boys have given me unrealistic/unhealthy/unproductive expectations for engaging with boys. *Real* boys are human beings with complex emotions and needs, not used kleenexes to dispose of after cumming. *Real* boys don't come with an instruction manual, though. In most shows, movies and games, you know who is good or evil. You know what you're supposed to do because *virtual world* rules are laid out for you. *Real* feelings aren't like that. *Real world* boys/emotions/relationships/sex/love require work and effective communication.



Erik Rhodes

Medium: Porn

Tribe: Bodybuilder

Description:

Asd

Same body.
Supposed to become
him.

Others:

Armond Rizzo

CutlerX

XL

Wagner e Diego

Matthew Rush



Bara

Medium: Manga /
Comics Tribe: Bear

Description:

Asd

Others:
List authors

I don't feel ready for the *real world*. I default to my *virtual world* too easily, discovering new *virtual* boys (streamers, cartoon characters, actors, writers, activists) to fall in unrequited love with. I'm consuming them with less zeal, though. Slowly, I'm getting sick of porn, Grindr, thirst traps, mindless scrolling and all these godforsaken screens through which I sate my *virtual* desire. I have *real world* desires--just don't know what to do with them. I don't feel *real* myself.

What do I fucking do?

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8. Slide 4, Prowler: cover from “Prowler” bara comic by artist Tsumina Yatsu
9. Slide 4, sex scene: page from “My Hometown Hospitality” bara comic by artist Seizou Ebisubashi
10. Slide 4, Tom of Finland art: drawing by Tom of Finland



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for more information on the youth and masculinities peer project (YMPP) visit

ppt.on.ca/programs/youth-masculinities-peer-project/

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planned parenthood toronto

36b prince arthur avenue

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